

Rep. Gary Alexander



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We'd like to hear from you!

If you have ideas, concerns or questions about legislative issues, please feel free to contact us. We are also here to help you in your dealings with state government.

2005 Session Review

• 20th District •

Summer 2005

Dear Friends,

The 2005 legislative session was a challenging one for many of us who came to Olympia to protect taxpayers. In the end, the citizens took a fairly big hit in their pocketbooks. The Legislature meanwhile missed important opportunities to provide more affordable health care options for consumers, restore public confidence in our election system, and bring job opportunities to Washington families across the state.

The session was defined by the majority party's appetite for new taxes, higher spending and more regulations better suited for Seattle than Centralia. For example, the Legislature adopted new costly vehicle emission standards that will add hundreds of dollars to the price of a car, even though Washington hasn't had a bad-air day in seven years.

As one King County lawmaker put it, "It was a Seattle session."

Nevertheless, there are important impacts, both positive and negative, on those of us in rural western Washington. I hope you find this session review informative. If you have comments or questions about the work of the Legislature, we hope you'll take the time to contact us. Although our work in Olympia is complete, we're here to serve you year-round.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature of Richard DeBolt in blue ink.

Richard DeBolt
State Representative

A handwritten signature of Gary Alexander in blue ink.

Gary Alexander
State Representative

Toll-Free Legislative Hotline:

1-800-562-6000

• We look forward to hearing from you! •

2005 Session Review

20th
Legislative
District

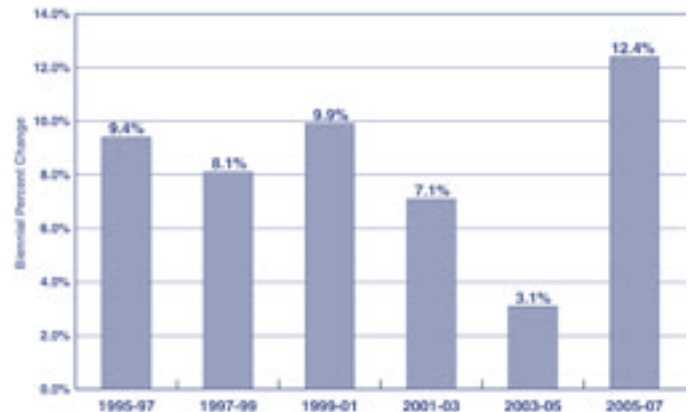
Budget excesses, tax increases define session

One of the defining disappointments of the 2005 session was the Legislature's failure to protect taxpayers and support our state's economic recovery by crafting a responsible two-year state operating budget. Lawmakers had a great opportunity to protect core services without tax increases, as tax revenue to support the budget was up 7 percent over the previous biennium.

But that simply wasn't enough for the majority party budget writers, who couldn't seem to find a way to say "no" to special interests. In the end, they adopted a partisan budget that raises spending by 12.4 percent and requires nearly half a billion dollars in tax increases. The budget raids \$233 million from other accounts and shortchanges pension funds to pay for \$26.1 billion in spending.

The budget is built on such shaky fiscal grounds that, even with the tax increases, the state will be facing a projected shortfall of \$564 million by the next budget cycle.

General Fund – State Expenditures



Taxpayers denied a seat at the budget table

While Republicans urged lawmakers to work for a balanced budget without tax increases, we were not offered a seat at the table when the final budget agreement was crafted.

Rep. Alexander, the ranking Republican on the House Appropriations Committee, fought hard for a no-new-tax budget approach, using the Priorities of Government process employed by Dino Rossi and Gary Locke in 1993. Instead, each budget proposal - from the governor, the House and the Senate – called for double-digit spending increases and new taxes.

Customarily, lawmakers negotiate a compromise that results in a spending level that falls somewhere in the middle. This time, however, majority party budget writers

struck a deal on the budget the only way they knew how: They made it bigger. The final budget package approved by the Legislature calls for a higher level of spending than any other proposal offered during the session.

Near General Fund-State 2005-07 Biennium (dollars in thousands)

		Change from 2003-05	% Change from 2003-05
Budget Proposals			
2003-05 (2004 Supp.)	\$25,167,797		
Gov. Gregoire	\$27,958,916	\$2,791,119	11.1%
Senate	28,184,025	3,016,228	12.0%
House	28,190,945	3,023,148	12.0%
Conference	28,231,940	3,064,143	12.2%

Progress on needed health care reforms stalls

There was a strong push this session to continue expanding government's control over health care decisions. We oppose this approach.

Health care reform was a top priority for us in 2005. Expensive mandates and runaway costs are limiting families' options for affordable health care coverage and making it harder for doctors and other health care providers to stay in business, especially in rural areas.

While government has a role in caring for our most needy, forcing every family onto government-run health care is not the answer. We need MORE health care options for families, not fewer. We support reforms that give employers flexibility to provide affordable health care coverage for employees and ensure they have a competitive menu of private coverage options to choose from. Not everyone needs the expensive one-size-fits-all coverage that's required under current law. A person shouldn't be forced to pay for acupuncture coverage if they don't need it.

We must also address rising liability costs, which are forcing many health care providers to close their doors or stop providing specialty services. Liability reforms are needed to control these legal costs and ensure we have health care providers available, especially in rural communities.

Authorizing health savings accounts is another idea we support that will help families save and use pre-tax income to pay for health care needs, helping stretch their health care dollars.



Prescription drug assistance

If you or someone in your family needs assistance to pay for prescription drugs, here are two programs that are available to help:

Rx Help for Washington helps citizens gain access to discount drug programs

Toll free 1-877-923-6779 • www.rxhelpforwa.org

Together Rx Access offers prescription drug coverage for qualified individuals

Toll free 1-800-444-4106 • www.TogetherRxAccess.com

Rep. Alexander is the Ranking Republican on the House Appropriations Committee, and is lead budget negotiator on behalf of the House Republican Caucus.

Minor election reforms adopted; potential for flaws remain

While several mistakes have been identified in last fall's gubernatorial election, the Legislature took only minor steps to prevent them from happening again in future elections.

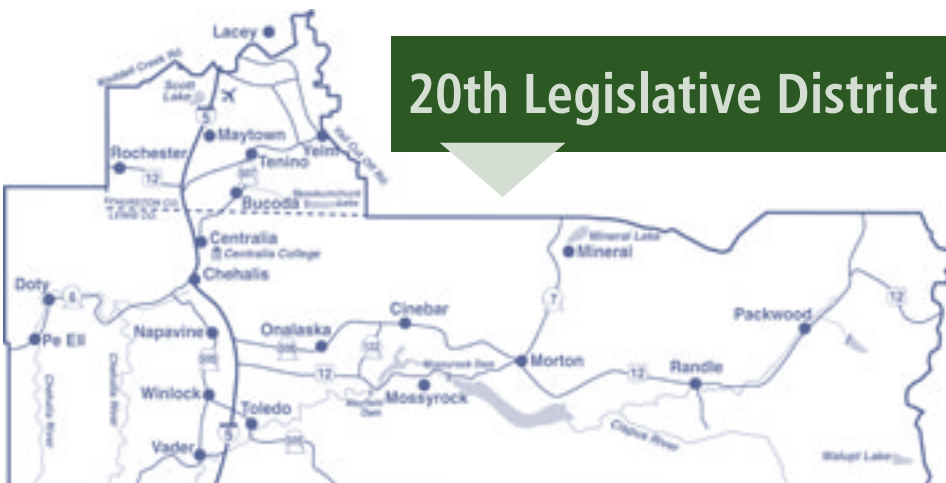
Lawmakers discussed several ways of improving our state's election system. In the end, we made positive but minor improvements.

Here are some of the changes you'll see in future elections:

- Provisional ballots will look different than regular ballots, to help prevent them from being counted before they are validated.
- Citizens registering to vote will have to sign that they are eligible.
- Voter registration rolls will be periodically checked against law enforcement data bases to identify felons.
- Counties will be given more time to certify elections, giving overseas military voters more time for their ballots to arrive and be counted.
- The practice of election staff marking ballots to "enhance" them is prohibited.

The Legislature failed to adopt some of the meaningful reforms needed to ensure fair, accurate elections and restore public confidence in results. Here are some of the reforms we supported that failed to gain approval:

- Requiring photo identification at the polls and proof of citizenship at the time of registration.
- Moving the primary election date to an earlier time, to ensure our overseas military voters receive their general election ballots in a timely manner.
- Cleaning up voter registration rolls to remove deceased voters and others who have relocated.
- Triggering an automatic revote when discrepancies between the number of legal votes and the number of voters exceeds the margin of victory.



Representative
Gary Alexander
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Richard DeBolt

State faces setback in job creation efforts

In addition to the tax increases that will place an added burden on our economy, the Legislature missed a key opportunity to improve our state's business climate and fuel our economic recovery. In fact, we took a big step backward by repealing the historic reforms to the state's unemployment insurance system that were a key piece of the package that convinced Boeing to build its 7E7 here in Washington. Those reforms also helped hundreds of other smaller employers in our state and made UI benefits sustainable and fair for laid off workers who need assistance. But we



are now reverting back to the expensive system that shortchanges benefits for non-seasonal workers.

The Legislature also failed to address the problems that make our state's workers' compensation system one of the most expensive in the nation. Reforms are still needed to control costs and protect benefits for injured workers. And while there seemed to be consensus among lawmakers of both parties that tax reforms were needed to help small employers and start-up businesses become successful, no such reforms were adopted.

DeBolt plan to protect timber jobs snubbed

A plan by Rep. DeBolt to bring jobs back to Washington's struggling timber communities hit a snag in the Democrat-controlled Legislature. House Bill 1103 would have provided incentives for timber operations that harvest, transport and process state timber using all local workers. The bill died in the House Finance Committee without coming up for a vote.

The measure would have provided an economic boost for rural areas that have lost hundreds of jobs in recent years. Under the bill, timber operators who harvest and process timber from start to finish within Washington's borders would receive expedited permitting and tax incentives on mill construction and trucking.

In addition to helping the ailing timber industry, DeBolt said the bill would have had a trickle-down effect, providing jobs for timber workers as well as construction laborers who build the mills, the trucking operators, the mechanics and others who offer support to the industry, and business owners in the communities where mills are located.

The lawmaker who is chairman of the Finance Committee refused to bring the bill up for a vote, but we will continue to impress upon legislators from Seattle how important this is to our local families.



In May Rep. DeBolt was again elected as House Republican Leader by his colleagues. DeBolt served as caucus leader in 2004 and will again be in charge of setting priorities and developing a solution-oriented agenda for the House Republican Caucus.

Capital projects approved for local communities

One area where lawmakers took a bipartisan approach to meet the needs of our entire state was the capital construction budget. Our communities received over \$20 million for important local infrastructure projects in the 20th Legislative District.

The budget will enhance education opportunities and also improvements in recreation and tourism projects that will provide long-term economic benefits to the district. Among the key projects for the 20th Legislative District that are funded in the capital budget are:

Centralia College – \$3.2 million for the science building

South Puget Sound Community College – \$3.2 million for the science building and \$4.7 million for the Hawks Prairie satellite campus

Evergreen State College – \$22.25 million for modernization of the Daniel J. Evans Building

Rainbow Falls State Park – \$1 million for pedestrian foot bridge repairs and phase 2 of the Willapa Hills Trail development

White Pass Schools – \$269,000 for roof repairs

Chehalis – \$2.1 million for the Chehalis regional water reclamation facility

Veterans Museum – \$100,000 for the Veterans Memorial Museum in Chehalis

Roxy Theatre – \$75,000 for the Roxy Theatre in Morton

Tumwater Boys & Girls Club – \$400,000

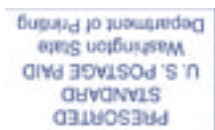
Olympia Child Care Center - \$90,000

City of Tumwater – \$71,000 for the Crosby House Museum

Behavioral Health Resources – \$400,000

City of Vader – \$596,000 for sewer system improvements

The only disappointment in this budget was the lack of funding for the Morton Train Depot and for improving infrastructure in Winlock to assist with local economic development efforts. We will continue to work to get support for these projects next session.



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